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Ontario Works
Participant Evaluation:
Interim Report # 1 -
Baseline Survey Findings

Social Planning & Research Council



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A United Way Agency



Ontario Works
Participant Evaluation:
Interim Report # 1 -
Baseline Survey Findings

by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interim Report #1 - Baseline Survey Findings is the first in a series presenting findings from the Ontario Works Participant Evaluation. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth (SPRC), under contract with the Region's Social and Public Health Services Division, has undertaken a twenty-eight month study of Ontario Works Benefits recipients as they participate in the new Ontario Works program.

The participant evaluation is one component of a broad evaluation plan, designed to gather information from many of the stakeholder groups involved in the Ontario Works program. While the SPRC speaks with participants in the program, the Region's Social and Public Health Services Division will be gathering information and feedback from Ontario Works staff and service providers.

The methods and tools used for data collection are based on a template developed for the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) by the Chrysalis Group (1997), with a few modifications. The original template was developed so that different Regional Governments could employ similar methods of evaluation, allowing for regional comparisons of findings.

The Ontario Works Participant Evaluation uses a longitudinal research design, and focuses exclusively on Ontario Works participants who volunteered to take part in the study. The research design involves conducting a survey of a baseline sample of Ontario Works participants, who will then be interviewed two additional times at six month intervals.

The following summary follows the format of the baseline survey, providing an overview of the characteristics of the sample population, perceived barriers to employment, perceived skills, perceived likelihood of finding work, participant understanding of the Ontario Works program, and perceptions of meetings with Ontario Works Case Workers. The report then describes the next steps in the evaluation process.

Characteristics of the Sample Population

In total, three hundred and thirty-five (335) Ontario Works participants were interviewed as part of the baseline survey. While the full report provides details and hard data on the specific characteristics of the sample population, the following overview highlights some of the key characteristics.

Our sample includes a broad range of age groups, including individuals from sixteen to fifty-six years and older. The gender distribution of baseline survey respondents is 63.3% male, and 35.8% female. The proportion of respondents with dependents was 38.2%.

In terms of education, respondents were asked to select one of six categories which best reflected their level of education. To highlight the two extremes in terms of education levels, 40.1% of respondents had not completed high school, while 11% had completed a degree or diploma.

Through the course of identifying the impacts of the Ontario Works program on participants, we were also interested in any specific barriers or impacts which may be experienced by a minority racial or language group. In terms of the racial group with which participants identified, 78% were white, 4.8% were black, and 10.6% identified another racial group. For 86.9% of participants, English was reported to be their "home language" or language most often spoken at home, while 13.1% reported a language other than English.

In terms of employment prior to receiving social assistance, 67.2% of respondents had worked at some point in the past, while 31% had not. When asked about any current employment, 37% reported being employed at the time of the survey. 69.3% of the participants had previously received social assistance, and 47.1% had received assistance within the past three years.

Perceived Barriers to Employment

More than 48% of respondents identified "transportation" as the greatest barrier to employment. The second greatest barrier to employment, based on our sample of Ontario Works participants, is "Physical Disability" 14.3%, appearing just ahead of "Long-Term Health Problem" 13.7%, "Cost of Working" 13.1%, and "Child Care" 12.5%.

Perceived Skills

A majority of respondents 68% agreed that they have a "very clear idea of the kind of job they want", and 64% feel that they have "the skills needed to do the kind of job they want to have".

In terms of actually finding work, twenty-eight percent 28% of respondents agree that they are "uncertain how to do a job search". When asked about outside supports, only 37% of respondents felt that they "know a lot of people who can help me as I look for work".

Perceived Likelihood of Finding Work

Our sample of participants are not overly confident that they will find employment in the near future. When asked if they believe that they will "be able to find work in the next three months?", just over half 54% agreed.

While 58% of survey respondents agreed with the statement "there are many jobs around that I can do", 82% agreed that "people have to look hard to find a job". Moreover, of the total baseline sample, 58% agreed that while they know what type of job they want, they "need some help finding it".

Participant Understanding of the Ontario Works Program

After an initial meeting with their Caseworker as well as a general information session, there is still some confusion among Ontario Works participants surrounding various aspects of the program.

The most positive response in this series was received by the question "Do you have enough information about your responsibilities in Ontario Works?". While seventy-one percent 71% of respondents answered "yes" to this question, there were twenty-nine percent 29% who felt they did not. In terms of "what to do if you cannot meet your responsibilities in Ontario Works", however, 49% of respondents felt that they had an understanding of this process, while 51% did not.

Perceptions of Meetings with Ontario Works Case Worker

A fair number of respondents 42% felt that they did not have enough time with their worker. Of those who asked questions of their Caseworker, 39% felt that they did not receive satisfactory answers.

Of the total sample of baseline survey respondents, 28% reported talking to their worker about problems they might have in "meeting the requirements of Ontario works". When asked "is your caseworker helping you deal with these problems?", only 24% answered "yes".

Discussion and Next Steps

It is important to note that baseline data collection was conducted early in the implementation stage of the Ontario Works program. During the period from February 1998 and March 1999 (the baseline data collection period) a number of changes have been made in terms of the process of informing and educating participants around Ontario Works. This is particularly important with respect to participant understanding of the Ontario Works program, and perceptions of meetings with Ontario Works Caseworkers.

As you can see, this report is more descriptive than analytical in nature, establishing a "snapshot" of our sample of participants as they enter the program. Interim reports will also be generated after the first follow-up survey and the focus group sessions, with a final report in May of 2000. These reports will identify any changes from the baseline findings.

The first follow-up survey will be completed by November 1999, with the second round of follow-ups to be completed by April 2000. To enhance our survey findings, focus groups will also be held with Ontario Works participants after the second follow-up survey.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This interim report is the first in a series presenting findings from the Ontario Works Participant Evaluation. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth (SPRC), under contract with the Region's Social and Public Health Services Division, has undertaken a twenty-eight month study of Ontario Works Benefits recipients as they participate in the new Ontario Works program.

The participant evaluation is one component of a broad evaluation plan, designed to gather information from many of the stakeholder groups involved in the Ontario Works program. While the SPRC speaks with participants in the program, the Region's Social and Public Health Services Division will be gathering information and feedback from Ontario Works staff and service providers.

The methods and tools used for data collection are based on a template developed for the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) by the Chrysalis Group (1997), with a few modifications. The original template was developed so that different Regional Governments could employ similar methods of evaluation, allowing for regional comparisons of findings.

The Ontario Works Participant Evaluation uses a longitudinal research design, and focuses exclusively on Ontario Works participants who volunteered to take part in the study. The research design involves conducting a survey of a baseline sample of Ontario Works participants, who will then be interviewed two additional times at six month intervals. The first follow-up survey will be completed by November 1999, with the second round of follow-ups to be completed by April 2000. To enhance our survey findings, focus groups will also be held with Ontario Works participants after the second follow-up survey.

The following report provides an overview of the methods involved in baseline data collection. It then follows the format of the baseline survey (APPENDIX A), describing the characteristics of the sample population, perceived barriers to employment perceived skills, perceived likelihood of finding work, participant understanding of the Ontario Works program, and perceptions of meetings with Ontario Works Case Workers. The report then describes the next steps in the evaluation process.

The report is descriptive in nature, establishing a "snapshot" of our sample of participants as they enter the program. Interim reports will also be generated after the first follow-up survey and the focus group sessions, with a final report in May of 2000. These reports will identify any changes from the baseline findings.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The baseline survey was designed to collect information in five key areas, including: basic employment history and demographics, perceived barriers to employment, perceived skills, opinions on the likelihood of finding work, understanding of the Ontario Works program, and perceptions of meetings with their worker. The SPRC made some modifications to the baseline survey, to collect information on the participant's home language (language spoken at home), and affiliation with a specific racial group.

The primary method of data collection was through telephone interviews. All potential respondents were assured that participation was completely voluntary and confidential, and refusal would not affect their benefits.

Interviewers were hired and trained by the SPRC, and scheduled to conduct interviews at various times of the day. The reason for staggering interview attempts through mornings, afternoons and early evenings was to ensure that every attempt was made to accommodate participants' own schedules. Contact with each potential respondent was attempted a minimum of three times. Telephone interviews could be completed in approximately ten minutes.

For those participants who either did not have a telephone or could not be reached at the number provided, a survey was sent by mail with a covering letter explaining the study (APPENDIX B). It was explained to participants that they would be contacted again for a follow-up interview, either by phone or in writing.

Participant contact information was forwarded from the Region's Employment and Income Support Branch to the project coordinator at the SPRC. Early in the process of baseline data collection, contact information was recorded on a form distributed to individual caseworkers at both the Hunter Street and Queenston Road Ontario Works offices. As new applicants signed Ontario Works participation agreements, their contact information was to be recorded and forwarded to a designated manager at each office.

This early approach to collecting and forwarding participant contact information was problematic in that recording of information was inconsistent. A meeting with regional representatives in July of 1998 resulted in a new method of forwarding contact information. This information was generated by the Region's mainframe at months end, providing a list of participants who met the criteria for participating in the study.

There were two criteria for participation in the Ontario Works Participant Evaluation. First, while eligible participants may have received social assistance in the past, they had to be entering the system at the time of signing an Ontario Works participation agreement. Second, the eligible participant had to be entering the program as an active participant, and not deferred from participation for any reason (reasons including, a short-term claim pending receipt of Employment Insurance or any other form of assistance, those participants whose cases were activated and deactivated in the same month, or those participants who were deemed unemployable for any reason).

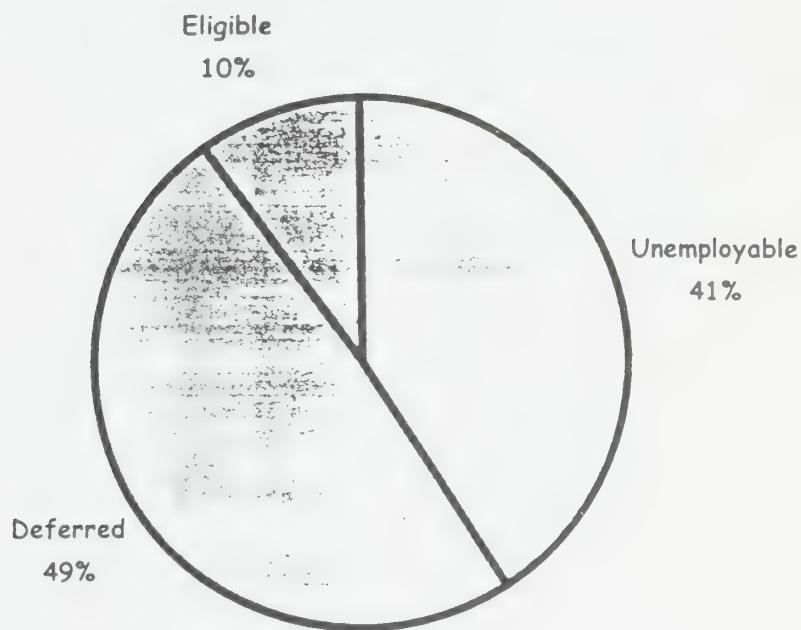
The process of baseline data collection began in February of 1998. While it was originally thought that data collection could be completed in six months, revisions to the methodology required revisions in the project's timelines. Baseline data collection was completed in March of 1999.

2.1 The Baseline Sample

In total, 335 Ontario Works participants were surveyed during the baseline component of our study. As noted in the previous section, the baseline sample of participants was drawn from new applicants to Ontario Works, who were not deferred from participation in specific program activities. The elimination of Ontario Works participants who did not meet the eligibility criteria resulted in a pool of potential participants reflecting approximately ten percent (10%) of the total monthly intake of participants.

CHART 1 provides a breakdown of the total number of new applicants during the month of October, 1998. Of the nine hundred and fifty-four (954) individuals who signed a participation agreement during the month of October 1998, three hundred and eighty-nine (389) or forty-one percent (41%) were deemed unemployable and four hundred and sixty-six (466) or forty-nine percent (49%) were deferred. This left ninety-nine (99) or ten percent (10%) of new applicants during the month of October as eligible survey respondents.

CHART 1: Breakdown of New Ontario Works Participants - October 1998



Response rates for the baseline survey averaged thirty-four percent (34%) of the total number of contacts forwarded on a monthly basis. This represents a combination of surveys completed by telephone (26.3%) and those returned by mail (11.6%).

The rate of refusal to participate in this voluntary study was less than seven percent (6.7%) among those potential respondents who were contacted. The remaining sixty percent (60%) of potential respondents could not be contacted by phone and did not reply to the written request to participate. In total, 12.8% of those surveys mailed were returned to the SPRC due to a wrong address.

3.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE POPULATION

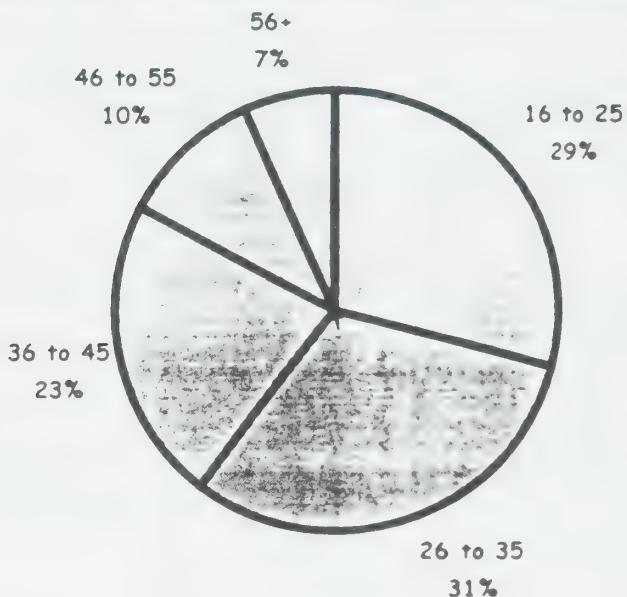
This section of the report will provide a basic analysis of the demographic characteristics and work history of the entire sample of participants.

Of the 335 participants surveyed, 244 or 72.8% were mandated to participate in Ontario Works, while 81 or 24.2% volunteered to participate. When baseline data collection began in January of 1998, the transition of Provincial Family Benefits Assistance (FBA) caseloads to either Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) was not yet complete. Those individuals receiving FBA at that time however, had the option to volunteer for specific Ontario Works programs.

At the time of this report the transition was complete. Those individuals who were moved from FBA to Ontario Works were then mandated to sign an Ontario Works Participation Agreement.

In terms of age, our sample of Ontario Works participants includes individuals from five predetermined age categories. There are 102 (30.4%) between 16 and 25; 108 (32.2%) between 26 and 35; 80 (23.9%) between 36 and 45; 36 (10.7%) between 46 and 55, and; 7 (2.1%) baseline survey respondents who are 56 years or older.

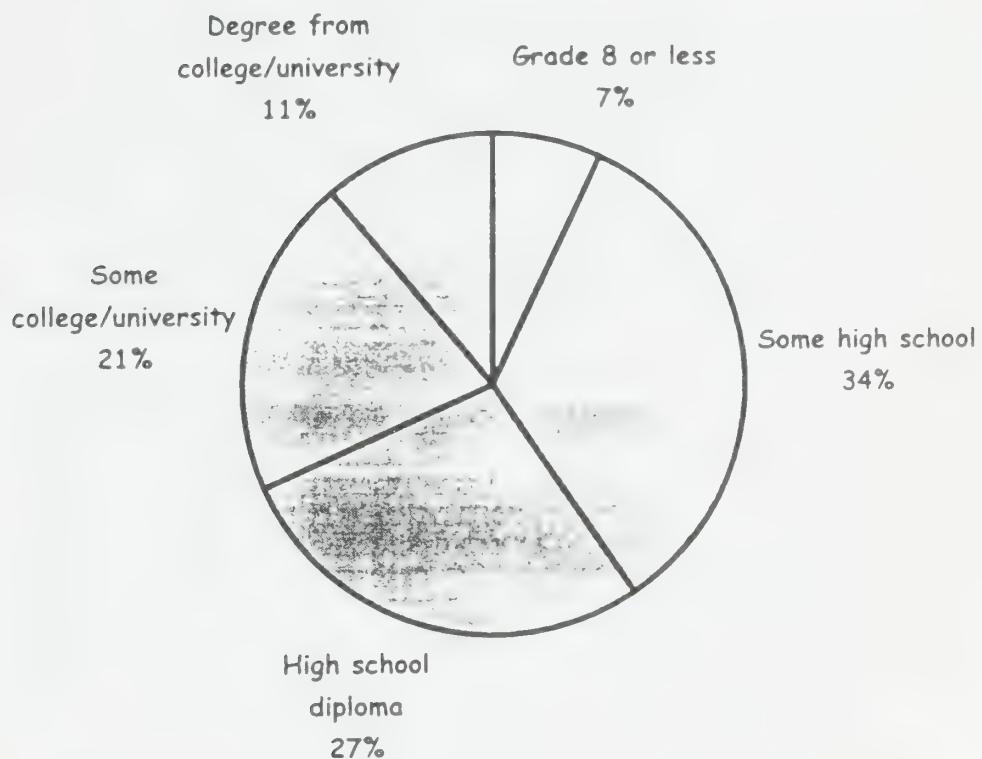
Chart 2: Age Distribution - Baseline Sample Population



The gender distribution of baseline survey respondents is 212 (63.3%) males, and 123 (35.8%) females. Of the total sample population, 182 (54.3%) of respondents were single, 70 (20.9%) were either married or common law, and 82 (24.5%) were either divorced, separated or widowed. The number and proportion of respondents with dependents was 128 or 38.2%.

In terms of education, respondents were asked to select one of six categories which best reflected their level of education. As depicted in CHART 3, of the 335 respondents, 23 (6.9%) had a grade eight education or less, 114 (34%) had some high school but not a diploma, 91 (27.2%) had a high school diploma or equivalent, 70 (20.9%) had some college or university, and 37 (11%) had completed a college or university degree or diploma. To highlight the two extremes in terms of education levels, 137 (40.1%) of respondents had not completed high school, while 37 (11%) had completed a degree or diploma.

Chart 3: Level of Education - Baseline Sample Population



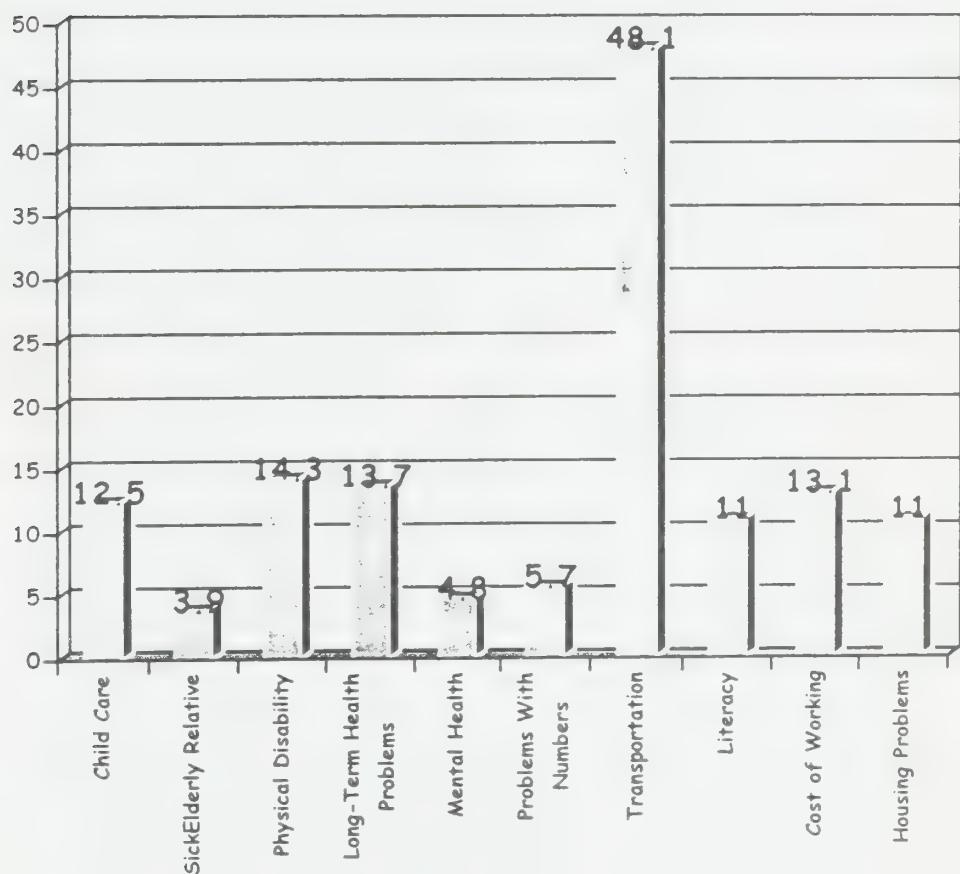
Through the course of identifying the impacts of the Ontario Works program on participants, we were also interested in any specific barriers or impacts which may be experienced by a minority racial or language group. In terms of the racial group with which participants identified, 262 (78%) were white, 16 (4.8%) were black, and 37 (10.6) identified another racial group. For 291 (86.9%) participants, English was reported to be their "home language" or language most often spoken at home, while 44 (13.1%) reported a language other than English.

With interest in understanding the history and experience of our sample population with respect to both the labour force and social assistance system, respondents were asked a series of related questions. In terms of employment prior to receiving social assistance, 225 (67.2%) of respondents had worked at some point in the past, while 104 (31%) had not. When asked about any current employment, 124 (37%) reported being employed at some level at the time of the survey. 232 (69.3%) participants had previously received social assistance, with 47.1% having received assistance within the past three years.

4.0 BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Baseline survey respondents were asked to identify specific barriers to employment that they experience. In many cases, participants identified more than one barrier. CHART 4 provides a list and total response rate for each of the potential barriers presented to respondents.

Chart 4: Potential Barriers to Employment



As is evident in CHART 4, "transportation", identified by more than 48% of respondents, is the greatest barrier to employment for our baseline sample population. The second greatest barrier to employment is "Physical Disability" (14.3%), appearing just ahead of "Long-Term Health Problem" (13.7%), "Cost of Working" (13.1%), and "Child Care" (12.5%).

Both "Literacy" and "Housing Problems" were identified as barriers by eleven percent (11%) of respondents, while the three least often identified barriers were "Problems With Numbers" (5.7%), "Mental Health" (4.8%), and "Sick or Elderly Relative" (3.9%).

Just as the sample population is diverse in terms of the demographic characteristics identified in the previous section, different sub-populations within the sample population experience specific barriers to a greater or lesser degree. Following are the key findings from an analysis of specific barriers among various sub-populations, identified by age, gender, home language other than English, previous receipt of social assistance, and presence of dependents.

As noted above, "Child Care" was identified as a barrier to employment by 12.5% of the total sample of respondents. When we consider specific sub-populations however, we see that females (20.8%), those with dependents (31.3%), and those between twenty-six and thirty-five years of age (27.5%) were much more likely to identify "Child Care" as a barrier to employment than the total sample population.

Respondents between the ages of forty-six and fifty-five were more likely to identify a "Physical Disability" as a barrier to employment (25%) than the population as a whole (14.3%). Those fifty-five years and older were more likely to cite "Long-Term Health Problem" (42.9% compared to 13.7% for the total sample population) and "Mental Health" (28.6% compared to 4.8% for the total sample population).

Eleven percent (11%) of the total sample population identified literacy as a barrier to employment. Among those in the sample population whose first language is not English however, thirty-four percent (34%) identified literacy as a barrier.

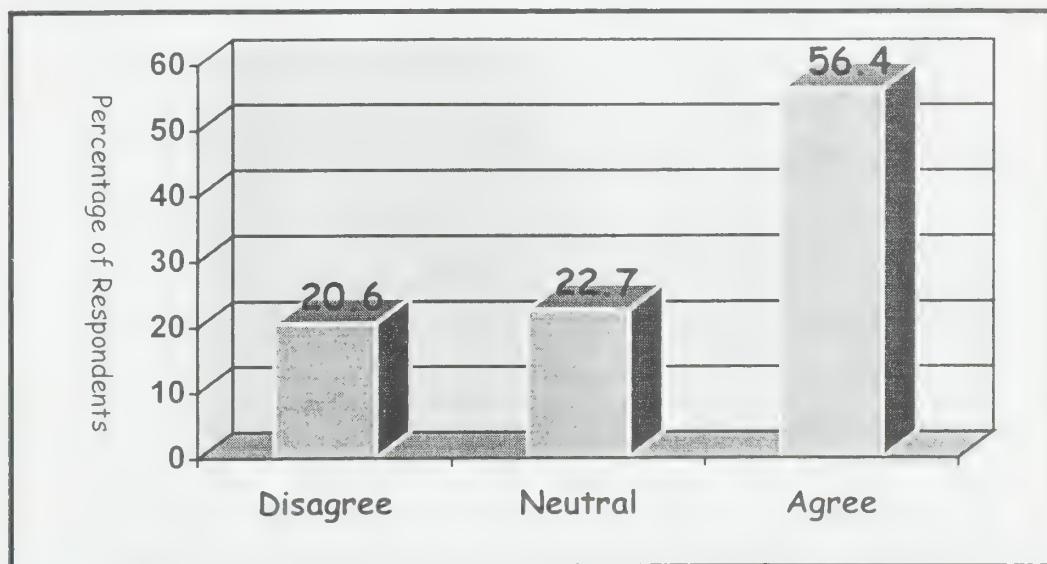
5.0 PERCEIVED SKILLS

As part of the baseline survey, survey respondents were asked a series of questions related to their own perception of their skills. Respondents were asked to rate a series of statements related to skills on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "strongly disagree", and 5 meaning "strongly agree".

Following is a summary of findings from each of the eight questions in this section of the baseline survey, based on the full baseline sample population. For the purposes of analysis, some of the responses were recoded to create three categories rather than five. Specifically, a response of either "1" or "2" has been collapsed to represent a disagreeable response. Similarly, a response of either "4" or "5" has been collapsed to represent an agreeable response. A response of "3" to a specific question then, represents a "neutral" response.

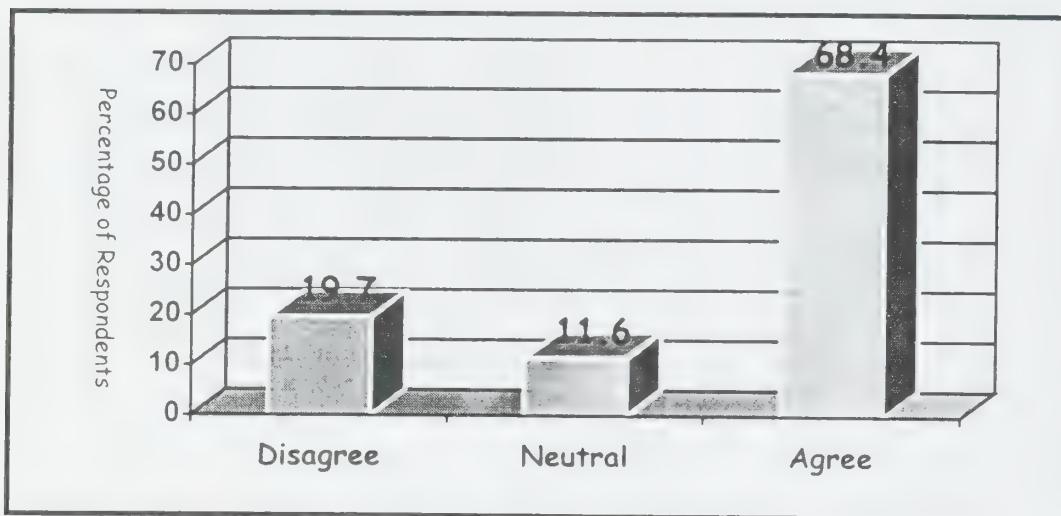
The first statement in this series read as follows: "I enjoy being interviewed by someone." CHART 5 depicts the distribution of responses, with 56.4% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 20.6% disagreeing and 22.7% providing a neutral response.

Chart 5: I Enjoy Being Interviewed by Someone



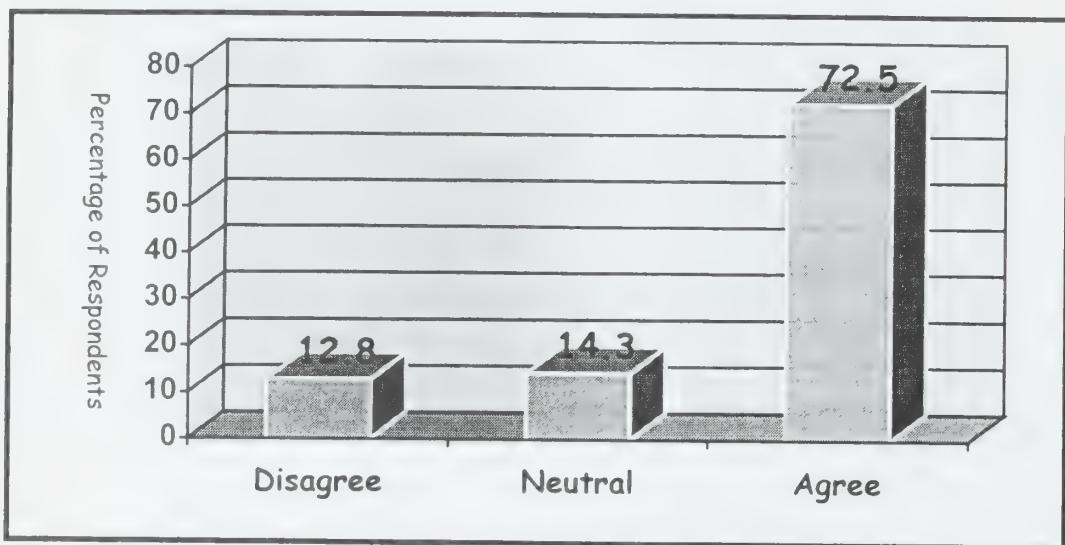
The second statement reflecting perceived skills read as follows: "I have a very clear idea of the kind of job I want." CHART 6 depicts the distribution of responses to this statement, with 68.4% of respondents in agreement, 19.7% in disagreement and 11.6% providing a neutral response.

Chart 6: I Have a Very Clear Idea of the Kind of Job I Want



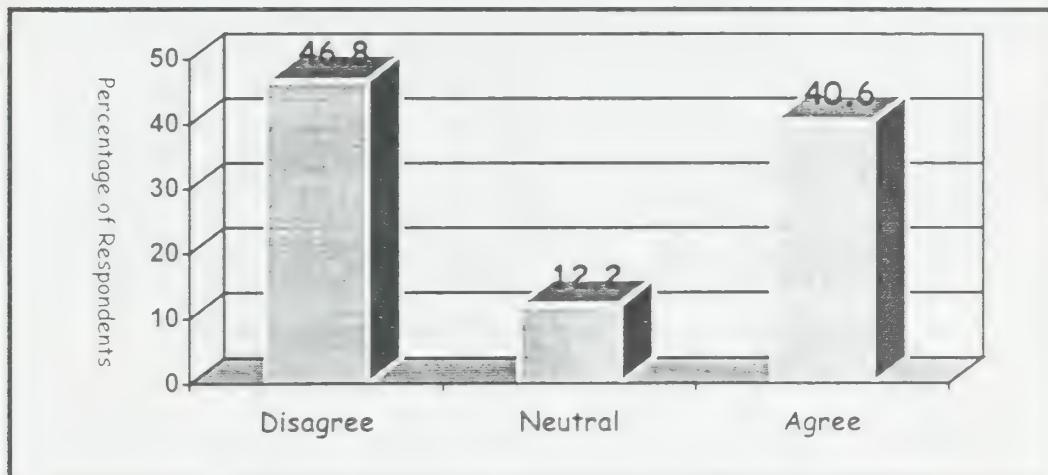
The next statement in this series read as follows: "I like talking to someone about my skills." CHART 7 depicts the distribution of responses, with 72.5% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 12.8% disagreeing and 14.3% providing a neutral response.

Chart 7: I Like Talking to Someone About my Skills



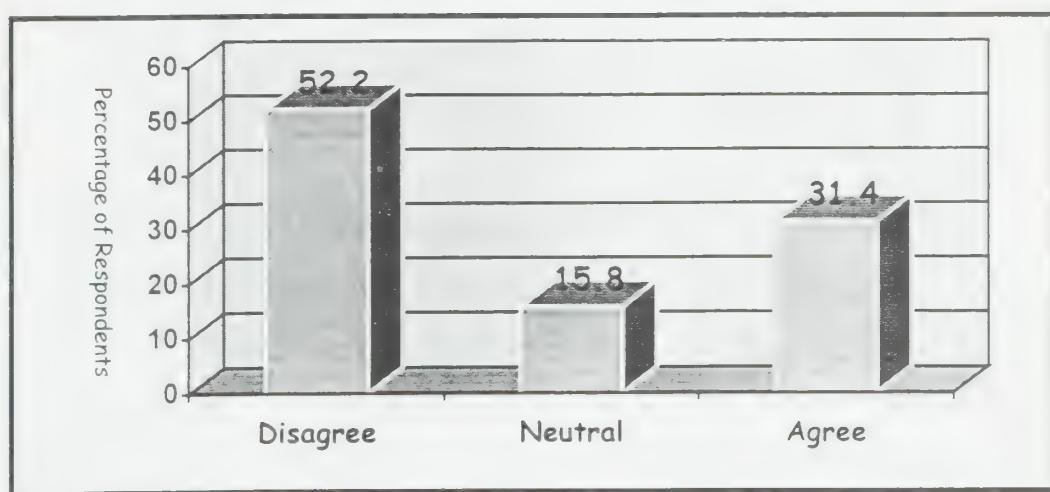
The fourth statement reflecting perceived skills read as follows: "I sometimes have difficulty clearly expressing my ideas to other people." CHART 8 depicts the distribution of responses to this statement, with 40.6% of respondents in agreement, 46.8% in disagreement and 12.2% providing a neutral response.

Chart 8: I Sometimes Have Difficulty Clearly Expressing my Ideas to Other People



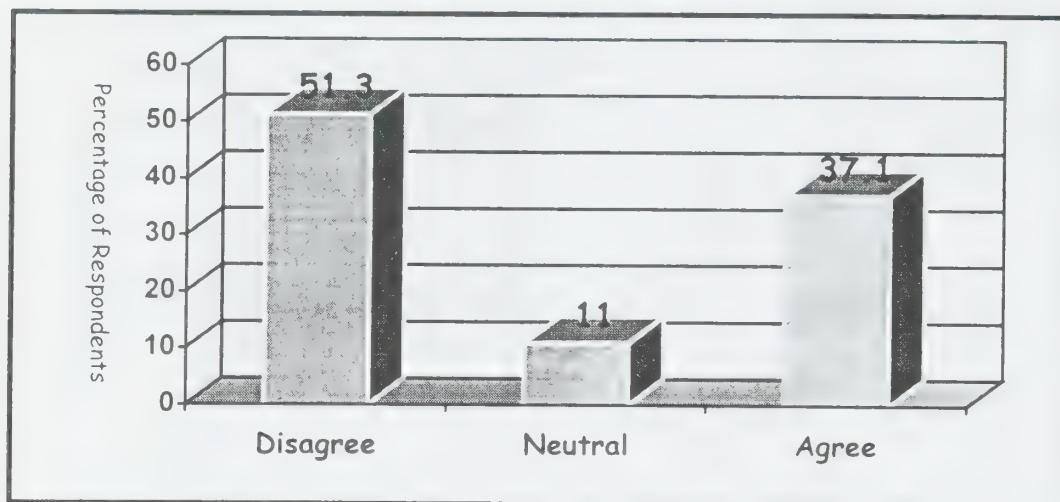
The next statement in this series read as follows: "I am uncomfortable when someone interviews me." CHART 9 depicts the distribution of responses, with 31.4% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 52.2% disagreeing and 15.8% providing a neutral response.

Chart 9: I am Uncomfortable when Someone Interviews Me



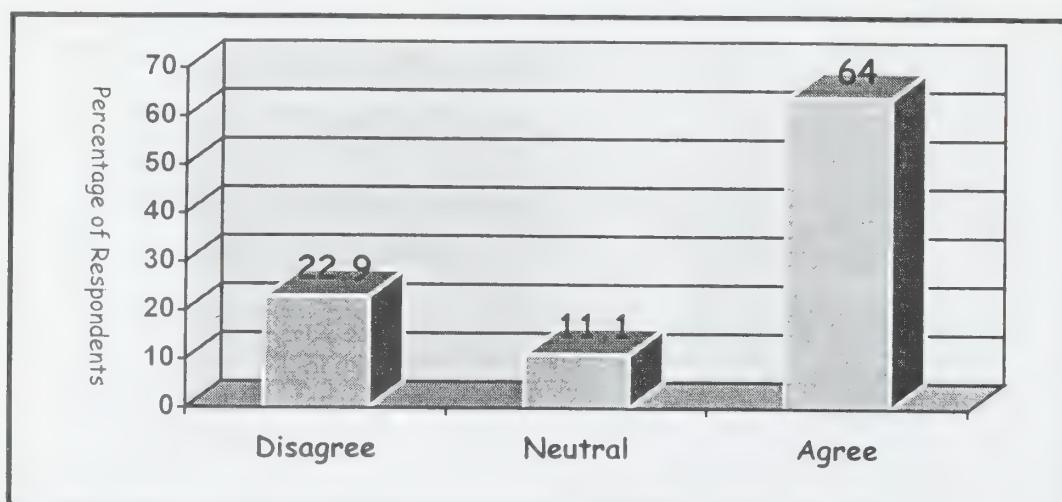
The next statement reflecting perceived skills read as follows: "I know a lot of people who can help me as I look for work." CHART 10 depicts the distribution of responses to this statement, with 37.1% of respondents in agreement, 51.3% in disagreement and 11% providing a neutral response.

Chart 10: I Know a lot of People who can Help me as I Look for Work



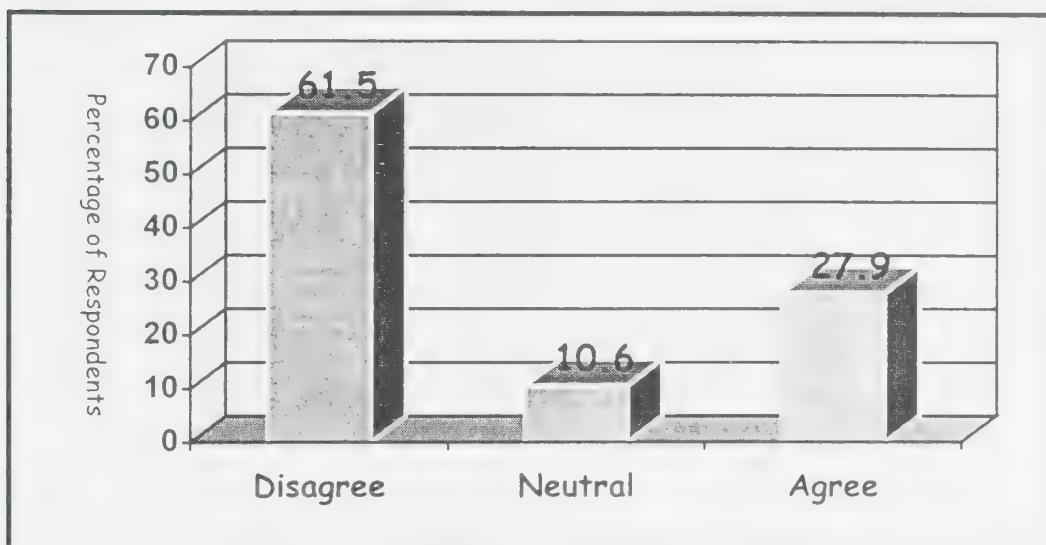
The next statement in this series read as follows: "I have the skills needed to do the kind of job I want to have." CHART 11 depicts the distribution of responses, with 64% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 22.9% disagreeing and 11.1% providing a neutral response.

Chart 11: I Have the Skills Needed to do the Kind of Job I Want to Have



The final statement reflecting perceived skills read as follows: "I am uncertain how to do a job search." CHART 12 depicts the distribution of responses to this statement, with 27.9% of respondents in agreement, 61.5% in disagreement and 10.6% providing a neutral response.

Chart 12: I am Uncertain How to do a Job Search



A number of observations can be made by considering responses to the entire series of questions related to perceived skills. A significant majority of respondents (68%) agreed that they have a "very clear idea of the kind of job they want", and sixty-four percent (64%) feel that they have "the skills needed to do the kind of job they want to have".

In terms of actually finding work, twenty-eight percent (28%) of respondents agree that they are "uncertain how to do a job search". When asked about outside supports, only thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents felt that they "know a lot of people who can help me as I look for work".

In order to identify any variation within the baseline sample population, an analysis of responses was conducted for a number of sub-populations. Specifically, we considered a breakdown by age groups, by gender by visible minority status, by home language (considering those whose home language is not English a sub-population), those who had previously received social assistance, and those with dependents.

While not every sub-population provided a different distribution of responses than the sample as a whole, there were several instances where variation was observed. For example, the rate of agreement with the statement "I know a lot of people who can help me as I look for work" dropped as age increased, from forty-eight percent (48%) among those aged sixteen to twenty-five, to fourteen percent (14%) among those over fifty-five. Males (44%) were also more likely to agree with this statement than females (26%).

Among those respondents who identified either a home language other than English or visible minority status, the rate of agreement with the statement "I sometimes have difficulty expressing my ideas to other people" was significantly higher than the sample population as a whole. Both of these populations also reported a higher rate of agreement with the statement "I am uncertain how to do a job search", although both reported a relatively high rate of agreement with the statement "I have a clear idea of the kind of job I want".

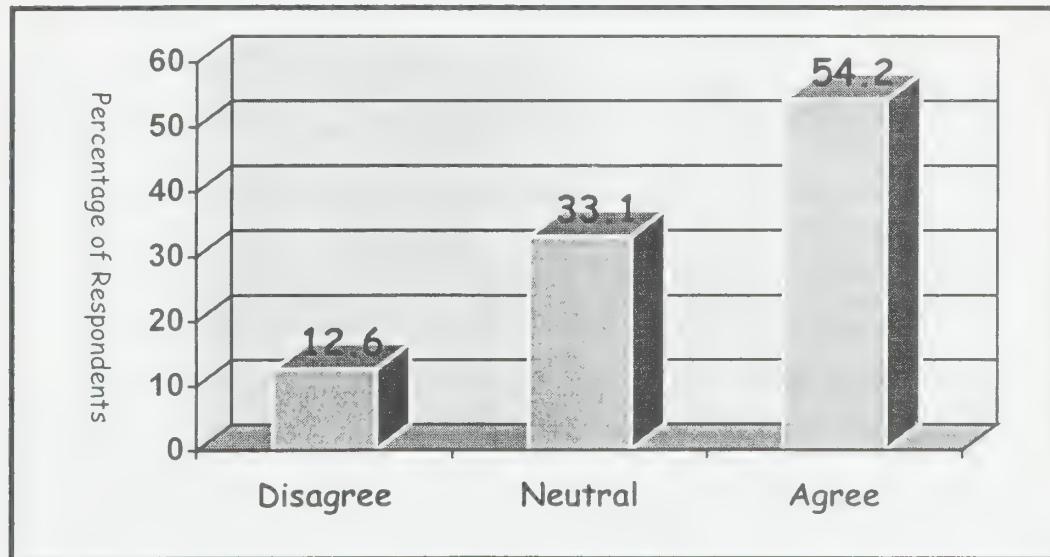
6.0 PERCEIVED LIKELIHOOD OF FINDING WORK

As part of the baseline survey, survey respondents were asked a series of questions related to their perception of the likelihood of finding work. Respondents were asked to rate a series of statements related to their likelihood of finding work on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "strongly disagree", and 5 meaning "strongly agree".

Following is a summary of findings from each of the eight questions in this section of the baseline survey, based on the full baseline sample population. As with similar questions involving a five point scale for responses, some of the responses were recoded to create three categories rather than five. Specifically, a response of either "1" or "2" has been collapsed to represent a disagreeable response. Similarly, a response of either "4" or "5" has been collapsed to represent an agreeable response. A response of "3" to a specific question then, represents a "neutral" response.

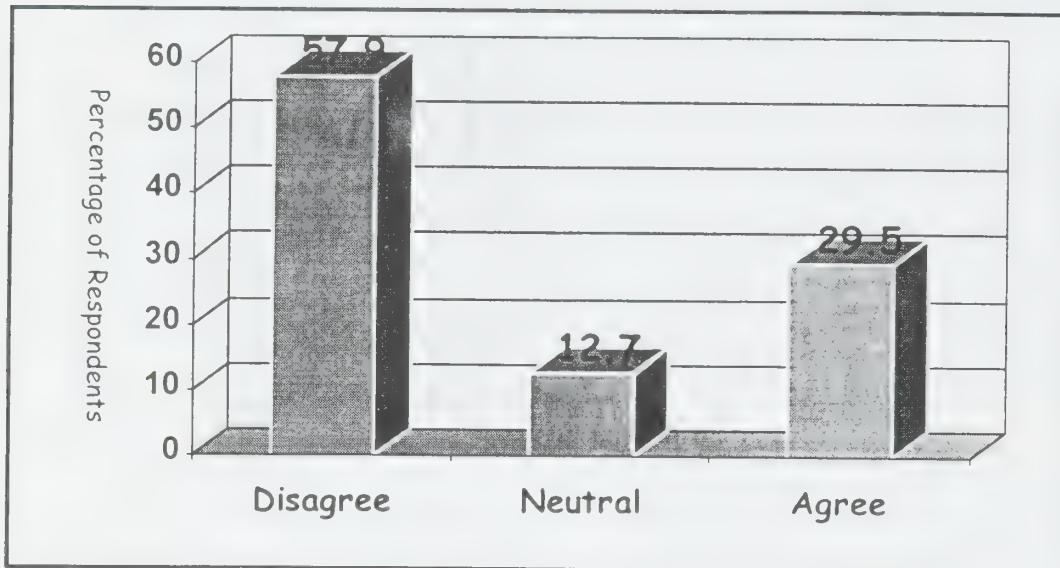
The first statement in this series read as follows: "I will be able to find work in the next three months." CHART 13 depicts the distribution of responses, with 54.2% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 12.6% disagreeing and 33.1% providing a neutral response.

Chart 13: I Will be Able to Find Work in the Next Three Months



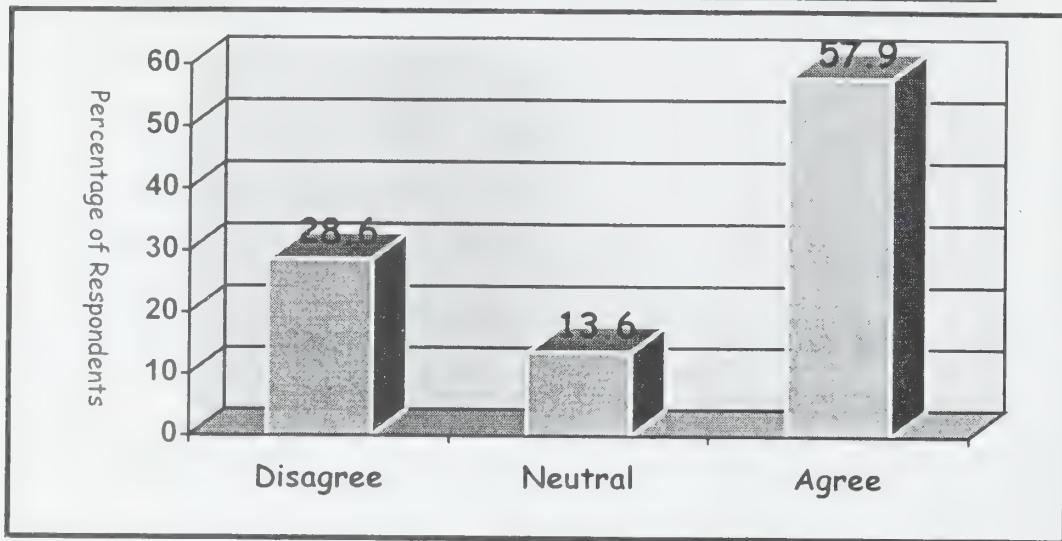
The second statement reflecting perceived skills read as follows: "Finding a job is not too difficult." CHART 14 depicts the distribution of responses to this statement, with 29.5% of respondents in agreement, 57.9% in disagreement and 12.7% providing a neutral response.

Chart 14: Finding a Job is not too Difficult



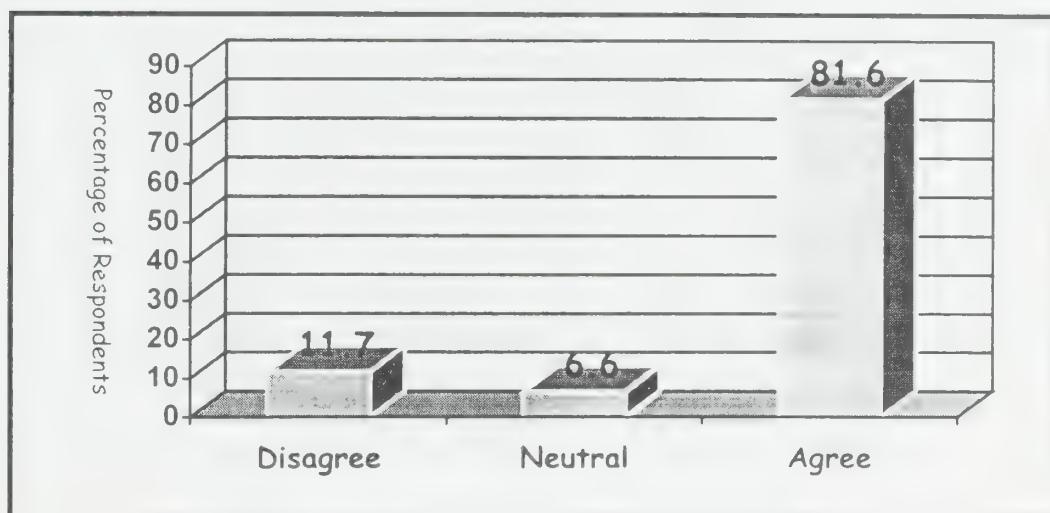
The next statement in this series read as follows: "There are many jobs around that I can do." CHART 15 depicts the distribution of responses, with 57.9% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 28.6% disagreeing and 13.6% providing a neutral response.

Chart 15: There are Many Jobs Around That I Can Do



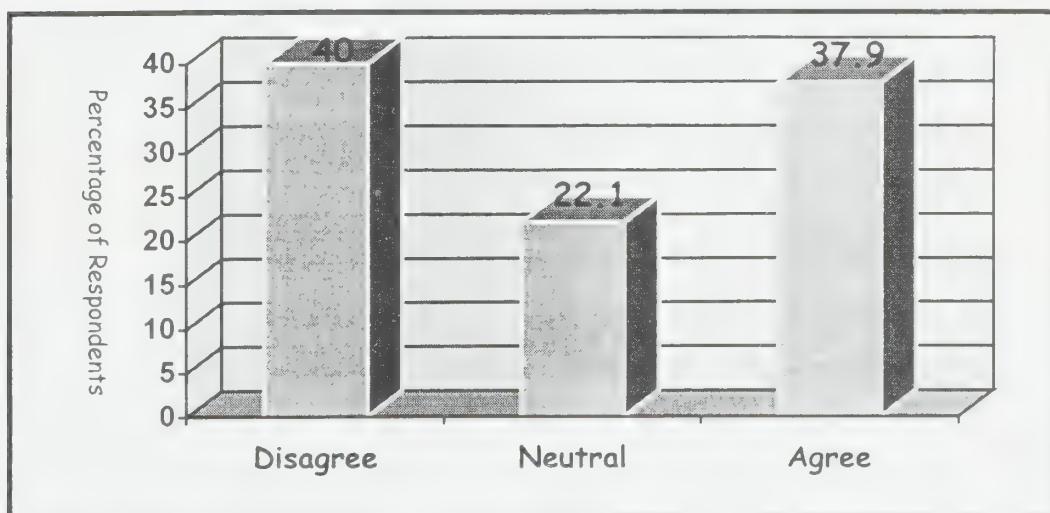
The fourth statement reflecting perceived skills read as follows: "People have to look hard to find a job." CHART 16 depicts the distribution of responses to this statement, with 81.6% of respondents in agreement, 11.7% in disagreement and 6.6% providing a neutral response.

Chart 16: People Have to Look Hard to Find a Job



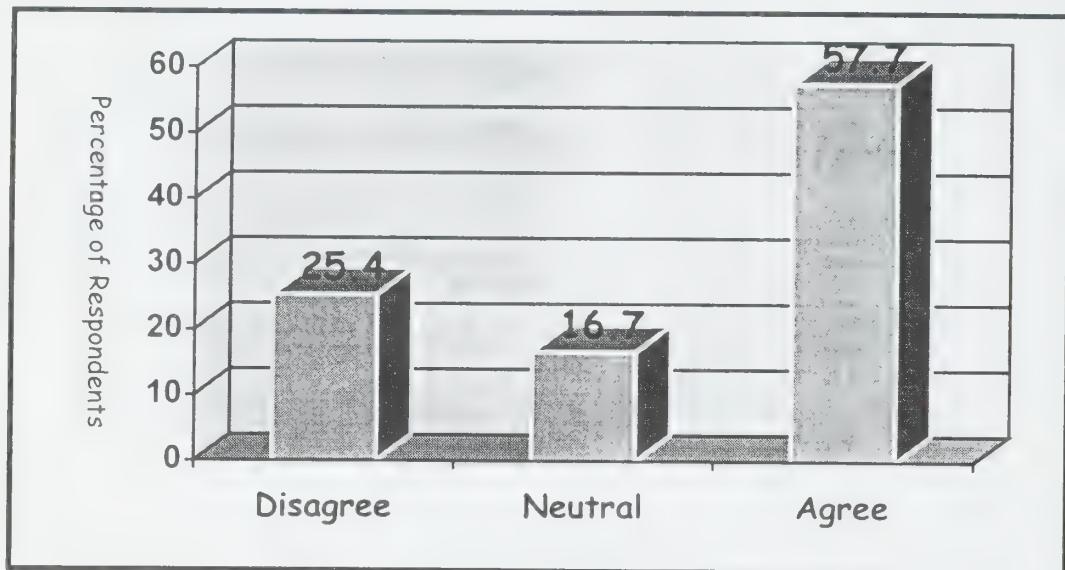
The next statement in this series read as follows: "There aren't many jobs around that I want to do." CHART 17 depicts the distribution of responses, with 37.9% of respondents agreeing with the statement, 40% disagreeing and 22.1% providing a neutral response.

Chart 17: There Aren't Many Jobs Around that I Want to Do



The final statement reflecting perceived skills read as follows: "I know what kind of job I want, but I need help finding it." CHART 18 depicts the distribution of responses to this statement, with 57.7% of respondents in agreement, 25.4% in disagreement and 16.7% providing a neutral response.

Chart 18: I Know what Kind of Job I Want, But I Need Help Finding It



As we can see from responses to this series of questions, our sample of participants are not overly confident that they will find employment in the near future. When asked if they believe that they will "be able to find work in the next three months?", just over half (54%) agreed.

While fifty-eight percent (58%) of survey respondents agreed with the statement "there are many jobs around that I can do", eighty-two percent agreed that "people have to look hard to find a job". Moreover, of the total baseline sample, fifty-eight percent (58%) agreed that while they know what type of job they want, they "need some help finding it".

In order to identify any variation within the baseline sample population, an analysis of responses was conducted for a number of sub-populations. Specifically, we considered a breakdown by age groups, by gender by visible minority status, by home language (considering those who's home language is not English a sub-population), those who had previously received social assistance, and those with dependents.

While not every sub-population provided a different distribution of responses than the sample as a whole, there were several instances where variation was observed. For example, males (59%) were more confident than females (45%) that they would find work in the next three months. At the same time, males (62%) felt that they needed help finding a job, while this was true for only fifty-one (51%) of females.

Although among the total baseline sample fifty-eight percent (58%) of respondents agreed to the statement "there are many jobs around that I can do", only twenty-nine percent (29%) of respondents over the age of fifty-five agreed. Those between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-five were the most likely to agree with the above statement, at a rate of sixty-five percent (65%).

Those individuals reporting a home language other than English were the most likely to agree that they need some help finding a job (75%), with those of visible minority status agreeing seventy-one percent (71%) of the time.

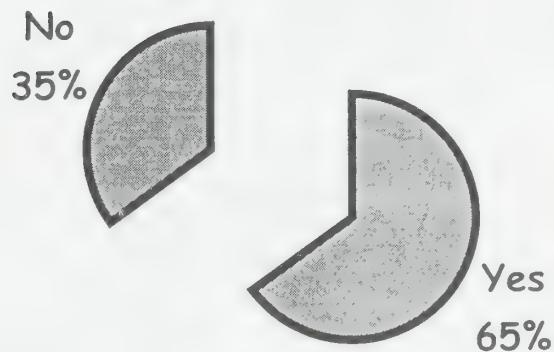
7.0 PARTICIPANT UNDERSTANDING OF THE ONTARIO WORKS PROGRAM

This component of the baseline survey was developed to gauge the level of awareness among Ontario Works participants of the purpose of the program, their choice of activities under Ontario Works, their responsibilities as Ontario Works participants, and their recourse in the event that they cannot meet their responsibilities. At the time the survey was conducted, each of the respondents had signed a participation agreement and had attended a mandatory Ontario Works information session.

Baseline survey respondents were asked to answer a series of "yes" or "no" questions related to their understanding of the Ontario Works program. Following is a summary of findings based on responses from the total baseline sample population.

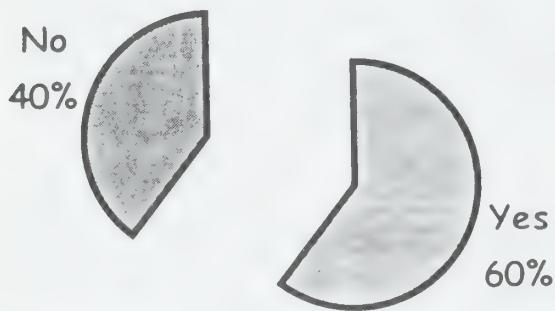
The first question in this series asked simply "Do you have enough information about what Ontario Works is?" As depicted in CHART ?, of the 335 Ontario Works participants surveyed, 65% responded "yes" to this question, while 35% felt that they did not have enough information.

Chart 19: Do You Have Enough Information About what Ontario Works Is?



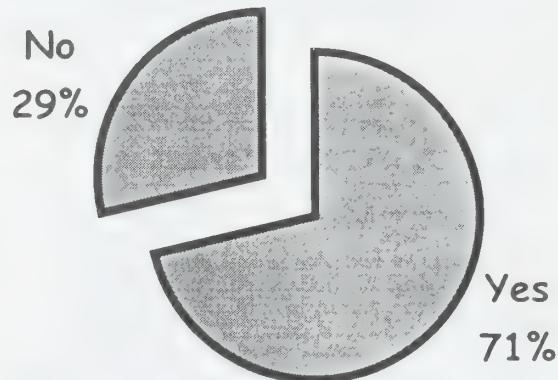
Question two in this series asked "Do you have enough information about how Ontario Works might help you?" As depicted in CHART 20, 60% responded "yes" to this question, while 40% felt that they did not have enough information about how Ontario Works might help them.

Chart 20: Do You Have Enough Information About how Ontario Works Might Help You?



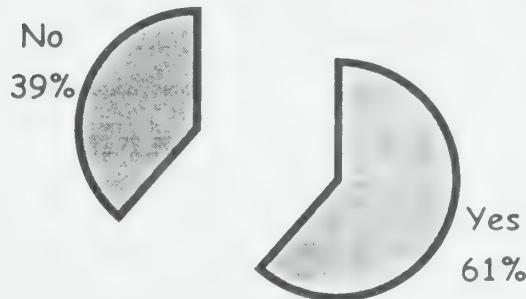
Question three in this series asked "Do you have enough information about your responsibilities in Ontario Works?" As depicted in CHART 21, 71% of those surveyed responded "yes" to this question, while 29% felt that they did not have enough information about their responsibilities in Ontario Works.

Chart 21: Do You Have Enough Information About your Responsibilities in Ontario Works?



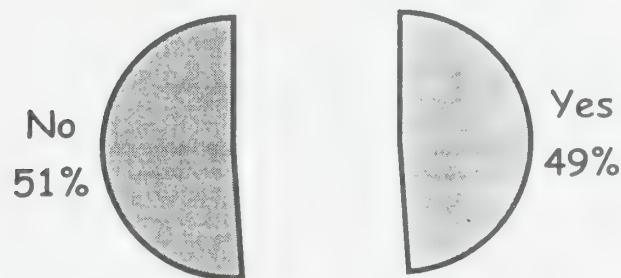
The fourth question in this series asked "Do you have enough information about your choices of activities in Ontario Works?" As depicted in CHART 22, 61% of those surveyed responded "yes" to this question, while 39% felt that they did not have enough information about their choices of activities in Ontario Works.

Chart 22: Do You Have Enough Information About your Choices of Activities
in Ontario Works?



The final question in this series was as follows: "Do you have enough information about what to do if you cannot meet your responsibilities in Ontario Works?" As depicted in CHART 23, 49% of those surveyed responded "yes" to this question, while 51% felt that they did not have enough information about their responsibilities in Ontario Works.

Chart 23: Do You Have Enough Information About What to do if You Cannot
Meet Your Responsibilities in Ontario Works?



What we can tell from the findings from this component of the baseline survey is that, after an initial meeting with their Caseworker as well as a general information session, there is still some confusion among Ontario Works participants surrounding various aspects of the program.

The most positive response in this series was received by the question "Do you have enough information about your responsibilities in Ontario Works?". While seventy-one percent (71%) of respondents answered "yes" to this question, there were twenty-nine percent (29%) who felt they did not. In terms of "what to do if you cannot meet your responsibilities in Ontario Works", however, forty-nine percent (49%) of respondents felt that they had an understanding of this process, while fifty-one percent (51%) did not.

The frequency of "yes" responses to the remaining four questions ranged between sixty (60%) to sixty-five percent (65%). What this tells us is that between thirty-five (35%) to forty percent (40%) of respondents felt that they do not have enough information about "what Ontario Works is", "how it might help you", or "about your choice of activities in Ontario Works".

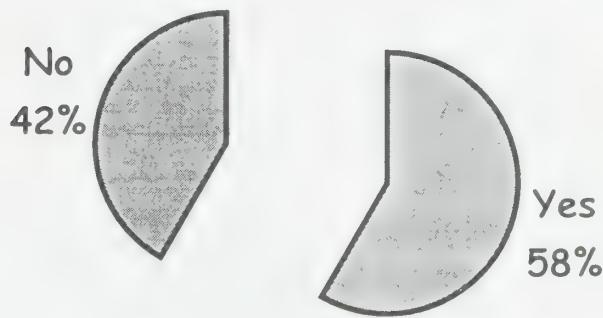
8.0 PERCEPTIONS OF MEETINGS WITH ONTARIO WORKS CASEWORKER

This component of the baseline survey focused on the Ontario Works participant's meeting with their caseworker. A series of closed-ended questions were designed to understand the perceptions of Ontario Works participants in terms of length of meeting time, the ability of the caseworker to satisfactorily answer any questions the participant may have had, the opportunity to discuss any problems in meeting the program requirements, and, if so, whether or not the worker is actively addressing these problems. Participants were also given the opportunity to identify, in their own words, what (if anything) they liked about their meeting, and how they might improve these meetings.

As in the previous section, survey respondents were asked a series of questions to which they were asked to respond either "yes" or "no". Following is a summary of findings based on responses from the total baseline sample population.

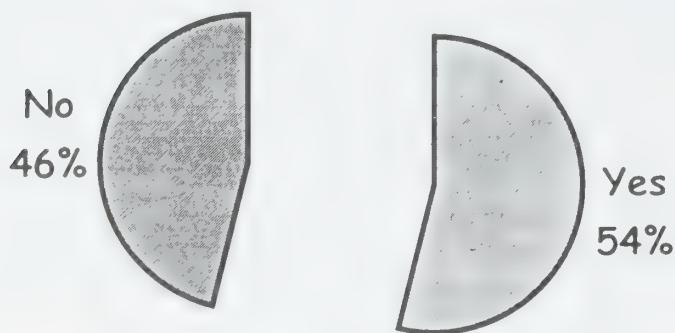
The first question in this series asked to survey respondents was "Did you have enough time with your worker to discuss Ontario Works?" as depicted in CHART 24, 58% responded "yes" to this question, while 42% responded "no".

Chart 24: Did You Have Enough Time with your Worker to Discuss Ontario Works?



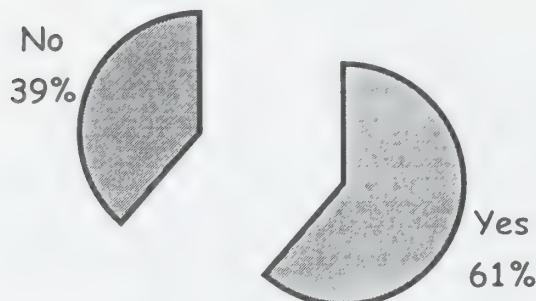
Survey respondents were asked "Did you ask your worker all the questions you wanted to about Ontario Works?" As depicted in CHART 25, 54% responded "yes" to this question, while 46% felt that they did not ask their worker all the questions they wanted to about Ontario Works.

Chart 25: Did You Ask Your Worker All the Questions You Wanted to About Ontario Works?



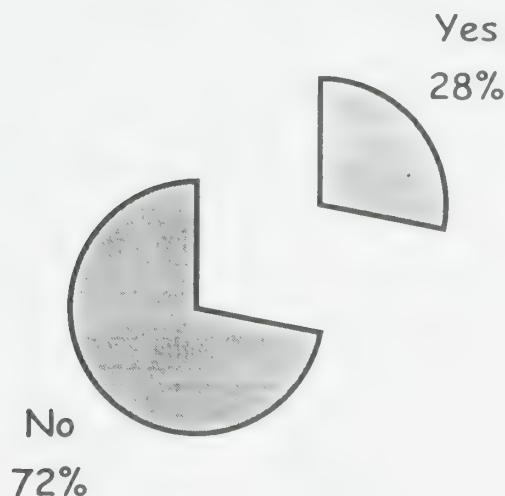
The next question in this series asked to survey respondents was "Did you receive satisfactory answers to your questions from your worker?" As depicted in CHART 26, 61% responded "yes" to this question, while 39% felt that they did not receive satisfactory answers.

Chart 26: Did You Receive Satisfactory Answers to Your Questions from Your Worker?



Survey respondents were then asked "Did you talk to your worker about any problems you might have in meeting the requirements of Ontario Works? CHART 27 shows that 28% of those surveyed responded "yes" to this question, while 72% responded "no".

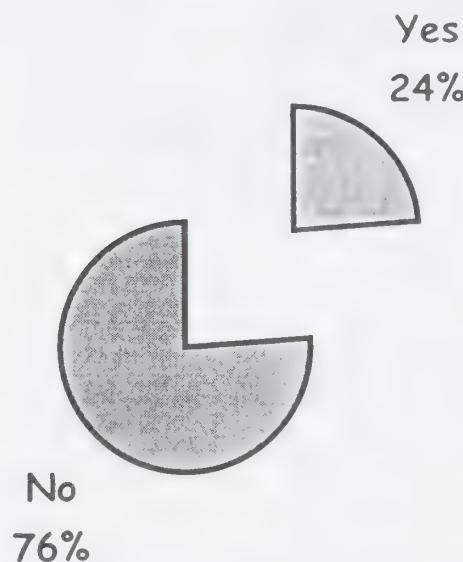
Chart 27: Did You Talk to your Worker About any Problems you Might have in Meeting the Requirements of Ontario Works?



The final "yes" or "no" question in this series was only asked in the case of a positive response to the previous question. If a participant felt that yes they did talk to their worker about any problems they might have in meeting the requirements of Ontario works, they were asked "Is your worker helping you deal with these problems?"

Given that 27% of respondents answered "yes" to the previous question, this question was asked to ninety respondents. As depicted in CHART 28, 24% responded "yes" to this question, while 76% responded "no".

Chart 28: Is Your Worker Helping you Deal with These Problems?



Through observing responses to this set of questions, we see that a fair number of respondents (42%) felt that they did not have enough time with their worker. Of those who asked questions of their caseworker, thirty-nine percent (39%) felt that they did not receive satisfactory answers.

Of the total sample of baseline survey respondents, twenty-eight percent (28%) reported talking to their worker about problems they might have in "meeting the requirements of Ontario works". When asked "is your caseworker helping you deal with these problems?", only twenty-four percent (24%) answered "yes".

In order to give respondents an opportunity to describe their meetings with caseworkers in their own words, and to provide practical suggestions as to how meetings might be improved, two additional set of questions were asked.

First, respondents were asked "were there things you liked about meeting with your worker?". Those who responded "yes" were then asked "what things did you like?" Of the three hundred and thirty-five (335) survey respondents, two hundred and twenty-one (221) or sixty percent (66%) answered "yes" to the first part of this question. To the second part of this question ("what things did you like?"), respondents provided a range of mainly positive comments about their worker, such as "polite", "friendly", and "straight forward".

The second set of questions addressed how meetings with caseworkers might be enhanced. Again, respondents were asked a "yes" or "no" question which read "are there ways you would improve the meetings with your worker?". Those who answered "yes" were then asked "how would you improve these meetings?".

To the first part of this question, one-hundred and five (105) or thirty-one percent (31%) answered "yes", there are ways to improve the meetings with their worker. In terms of "how" meetings could be improved, respondents most often suggested the following three ideas:

1. Meetings should be more focussed on getting a job
2. More information (on the program and job opportunities) should be provided during meetings
3. Easier access to caseworker

9.0 DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

It is important to note that baseline data collection was conducted early in the implementation stage of the Ontario Works program. During the period from February 1998 and March 1999 (the baseline data collection period) a number of changes have been made in terms of the process of informing and educating participants around Ontario Works. This is particularly important with respect to participant understanding of the Ontario Works program, and perceptions of meetings with Ontario Works Caseworkers.

As you can see, this report is more descriptive than analytical in nature, establishing a "snapshot" of our sample of participants as they enter the program. Interim reports will also be generated after the first follow-up survey and the focus group sessions, with a final report in May of 2000. These reports will identify any changes from the baseline findings.

The first follow-up survey will be completed by November 1999, with the second round of follow-ups to be completed by April 2000. To enhance our survey findings, focus groups will also be held with Ontario Works participants after the second follow-up survey.

Ontario Works Evaluation Participant Baseline Survey

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth
255 West Avenue North, Hamilton, Ontario L8L 5C8

Respondent ID Number: _____

Today's Date: ____ / ____
day month year

Respondent Name: _____

Respondent Phone: _____

Interviewer: _____

First, we need some information about you:

1. Are you participating in Ontario Works because you have to or did you volunteer?

- I have to participate
 I volunteered to participate

2. How old are you?

- 16 - 25 years old 46 - 55 years old
 26 - 35 years old 56 years old or more
 36 - 45 years old

3. Are you:

Male Female

4. What is your Marital Status:

- Single
 Married/Common Law
 Divorced/Separated/Widowed

5. Do you have dependent children? Yes No

6. Have you received social assistance at anytime before this?

Yes

No

(If no, go to question 7)

▼

▼

In what year did you last receive social assistance? _____

7. What is your highest level of formal education:

- Grade 8 or less
 Some high school
 High school diploma or equivalent

- Some college or university
 Completed degree or diploma

8. What language do you usually speak at home?

- English French Other

(What language?) _____

9. Where were you born? _____

10. Which Racial group do you identify with?

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White | <input type="checkbox"/> South East Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black | <input type="checkbox"/> Arabic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Phillipino | <input type="checkbox"/> Latin American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> South Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |

11. We would like to know about your work experience.

a) Do you currently have a job? Yes No

b) Did you have a job before
getting social assistance? Yes No

▽

▽

(If no, go to question 10)

c) Was the job full time, part time or seasonal?

Full Time Part Time Seasonal

How long did this job last? 0 - 3 months 13 - 24 months
 4 - 6 months more than 2 years
 7 - 12 months

Why did you leave this job? Quit Company closed

Fired Family reasons
 Laid Off Returned to School
 Other

Did you have another job before this one? Yes No

12. Now we would like to know about things that might make it hard for you to find or or take a job or do some training.

Which of the following might make it hard for you to find or take a job or do some training:

- Child care
- Taking care of elderly or sick relatives
- Physical disabilities
- Long term health problems
- Mental health
- Problems working with numbers
- Transportation problems
- Problems reading or writing
- Costs of working
- Housing problems
- Other reasons (please describe)

13. The next set of questions will tell us some of the skills you have now as you are looking for work. I would like you to respond to each statement on a scale from (1) to (5), depending on how you feel: (1) means you strongly disagree with the statement and (5) means you strongly agree with the statement.

For example, if I make a statement that describes how you feel "sometimes", but not always, you may rate it a (4). If the statement never applies to you, you may rate it a (1) for "strongly disagree". Do you understand these instructions? (If "no", repeat the instructions as they appear) Please listen to the following statements carefully and rate them from (1) to (5).

- a) I enjoy being interviewed by someone.
- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Strongly
Disagree | | | | Strongly
Agree |
- b) I have a very clear idea of the kind of job I want.
- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Strongly
Disagree | | | | Strongly
Agree |
- c) I like talking to someone about my skills.
- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Strongly
Disagree | | | | Strongly
Agree |
- d) I sometimes have difficulty clearly expressing my ideas to other people.
- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Strongly
Disagree | | | | Strongly
Agree |
- e) I am uncomfortable when someone interviews me.
- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Strongly
Disagree | | | | Strongly
Agree |
- f) I know a lot of people who can help me as I look for work.
- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Strongly
Disagree | | | | Strongly
Agree |
- g) I have the skills needed to do the kind of job I want to have.
- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Strongly
Disagree | | | | Strongly
Agree |
- h) I am uncertain how to do a job search.
- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| Strongly
Disagree | | | | Strongly
Agree |

14. In this next set of questions, we would like your opinion about the chances of finding work that you want to do. Again, I would like you to respond to each statement on a scale of (1) to (5), with (1) meaning you strongly disagree and (5) meaning you strongly agree.

a) I will be able to find work in the next three months.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

b) Finding a job is not too difficult.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

c) There are many jobs around that I can do.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

d) People have to look hard to find a job.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

e) There aren't many jobs around that I want to do.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

f) I know what kind of job I want, but I need some help finding it.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree

15. The next few questions will tell us about the information you have received from your worker and about your meeting(s) with your worker. Please answer "Yes" or "No" to the following questions:

- a) Do you have enough information about what Ontario Works is? Yes No
- b) Do you have enough information about how Ontario Works might help you? Yes No
- c) Do you have enough information about your responsibilities in Ontario Works? Yes No
- d) Do you have enough information about your choice of activities in Ontario Works? Yes No
- e) Do you have enough information about what to do if you can't meet your responsibilities in Ontario Works? Yes No
- f) Did you have enough time with your worker to discuss Ontario Works? Yes No
- g) How much time have you had with your worker to discuss Ontario Works?
- Less than 1 hour 1 - 2 hours More than 2 hours
- h) Did you ask your worker all the questions you wanted to about Ontario Works?
- Yes No
- i) Did you receive satisfactory answers to your questions from your worker?
- Yes No
- j) Did you talk about problems you might have in meeting the requirements of Ontario Works?
- Yes No
▽ *(If no, go to Question 14)*
▽
- k) If yes, is your worker helping you to deal with these problems?
- Yes No

16. Were there things you liked about your meeting with your worker?

Yes

No

▽

▽

(If "Yes") What things did you like?

17. Are there ways you would improve the meeting(s) you had with your worker?

Yes

No

▽

▽

(If "Yes") How would you improve these meetings?

61X (4)

Thank you very much for your help. During the next eighteen months we will be conducting follow-up surveys, so someone will be in touch with you to see which Ontario Works programs you have been involved in and what you thought of them. Good luck!

APPENDIX B
Baseline Survey Letter



Dear Ontario Works Participant,

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth is a non-profit organization that studies how government policy and programs affect local citizens. We have been hired by the Regional Community Services Department to evaluate the new Ontario Works program. We want to find out what participants think about the program, and if the program helps people find paid work.

We are very interested in what you have to say. You can help us by answering the following questions with a check mark (✓). When you have finished, simply put the completed survey in the return envelope and drop it in to any mailbox. Your participation will help us to understand your experience with Ontario Works.

Participation in the survey is voluntary and confidential. Your caseworker will never see your survey, and your answers and opinions will not effect your Ontario Works benefits. If you have any questions please call Mark Fraser at 522-1148 ex 318

Sincerely,

Mark Fraser
Project Coordinator





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